THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

VOL. LV, NO. 24: NOVEMBER 20, 1958

CONTENTS

Toynbee and the Limits of Religious Tolerance: MARIE C. SWABEY 1029

In Defense of Moral Absolutes: JUDITH JARVIS 1043

Objective Emotivism: WILLIAM THOMAS BLACKSTONE 1054

Ascriptions and Appraisals: V. C. WALSH 1062

PUBLISHED FORTNIGHTLY
BY THE
JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY, INC.

THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

FOUNDED BY FREDERICK J. E. WOODBRIDGE AND WENDELL T. BUSH

EDITORS: Herbert W. Schneider, John H. Randall, Jr., Robert D. Cumming.

CONSULTING EDITORS: Ernest Nagel, Alexandre Koyré, José Ferrater Mora.

MANAGING EDITOR: Emerson Buchanan.

Communications to the editors should be addressed to the Managing Editor, 713 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University, New York 27, N. Y. Subscriptions and advertisements should be sent to THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY, 713 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University, New York 27, N. Y. The annual subscription price (twenty-six numbers) is $5.25. The price of single numbers is 35 cents, double numbers, 60 cents.

THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY is owned by the Journal of Philosophy, Inc., and published fortnightly at Prince and Lemon Sts., Lancaster, Pa. Editorial Office: 713 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University, New York 27, N. Y. President, Albert G. Redpath; Vice President, John H. Randall, Jr.; Treasurer, Frederick A. Dewey; Secretary, Corliss Lamont.

Entered as second class matter, March 18, 1921, at the Post Office at Lancaster, Pa., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879.

Acceptance for mailing at special rate of postage provided for in paragraph (d-2), section 34.40, P. L. & R. of 1948, authorized March 11, 1952.

PUBLICATIONS

FOR SALE AT

THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY INC.

515 W. 116th STREET NEW YORK 27, N. Y.

A Bibliography of Philosophy, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936. 4 issues, 56 pages each. (Double numbers of THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY.) $1.00 each issue, $2.75 for the four issues.

Cosmogony. By Christian Ehrenfels. Translated from the German by Mildred Focht. xii, 223 pp. $2.50 (cloth cover).

Philosophy and Method. By Richard McKeon. Reprinted from THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY, Vol. XLVIII, No. 22, October 25, 1951, pp. 653–682. 35 cents.

Negation. By A. J. Ayer. Offprint, from THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY, Vol. XLIX, No. 26, December 18, 1952, pp. 797–815. 15 cents.

VOLUME LV, No. 24 NOVEMBER 20, 1958

THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

TOYNBEE AND THE LIMITS OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

IN recent years the new intimacy between countries made possible by the revolution in communications, as well as the mortal fear of one's neighbors induced by atomic weapons, has led men to a fresh study of the world's great religions in the hope of finding in them some bond on which to build a new temper of friendliness and tolerance. In this vein, following the completion of his vast *Study of History*, Arnold Toynbee has lately published *An Historian's Approach to Religion* (1956). Like Karl Jaspers and Aldous Huxley, proponents of the so-called perennial philosophy, Toynbee seeks to winnow from the tenets of rival religions a store of common beliefs through which men may unite practically and which may enable them, even while adhering to the cultural heritages of their multiple faiths, to regard each other with latitude, accommodation, and sympathy. In Toynbee's eyes, the spirit of peaceful coexistence among faiths is imperative for our time. Not only has scientific enlightenment, along with world-devastating weapons, made us aware of the public danger of awakening the wild beast in man, but renewed awareness of the value of human rights has shown us that freedom of the soul to stand without hindrance before God is part of that charity or brotherly love involved in the religious principle.

Convinced that ultimate reality is a mystery, Toynbee agrees with Quintus Symmachus that "The heart of so great a mystery cannot ever be reached by following one road only." At any rate, at present no decisive judgment as to the superior truth of one religion rather than another is possible. "In our generation," says Toynbee, "there is not anyone alive who is effectively in a position to judge between his own religion and his neighbor's" (p. 298). Accordingly, we may conclude that the mission of the great religions of the world is not competitive but complementary. As an historian, Toynbee is horrified at the record of violence, fanaticism, and forcible suppression found in the pages of the past involving the persecution of faiths, crusades, the slaughter of infidels, the Inquisition, and religious wars. These pages, moreover, he finds most prevalent in history in connection with the Judaic or Biblical religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), a ruthless-

ness induced, he concludes, by their exclusiveness, their insistence upon the falsity of all other faiths save theirs, and Jehovah as the one true God. Yet in this apparently boundless cordiality and forbearance towards different religious beliefs (limited only by intolerance of intolerance), Toynbee and adherents of the perennial philosophy, we would suggest, may in their turn encourage a serious error. Owing to the urgency of the world situation and the pragmatic, non-intellectual temper of the times, their natural impulse is to promote peace and harmonious relations by every means available. Nevertheless an uncritical adoption of such a policy may not conduce to the end they suppose. By inducing a certain indiscriminate sympathy towards values and concepts that are really incompatible, a superficial tolerance may retard rather than hasten genuine religious reconciliation and understanding. Such a situation seems not unlike that today in personal relations. In the modern world an assumed comradeship notable in the back-slapping, first-name terms of mere speaking acquaintances does not in fact of itself establish mutual trust and sincerity. The temptation from practical motives to profess more than one honestly feels and to conceal one's private preferences does not really bridge the gap or make necessarily for genuine *rapprochement* in society.

Although religions, to Toynbee, are in large part the product of cultural relations, and although our historical knowledge does not tell us how the spiritual light reaches us—"whether it comes to us by discovery or by intuition or by revelation" (p. 265)—he hazards the attempt to distinguish the *essentials* of faiths from their *non-essentials*. In doing so, as well as in his stalwart recognition of religious truth despite his uncertainty as to its methodology, Toynbee has, we believe, much to say of sound tendency. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Hinayana and Mahayana) appear to him as the great living religions of the world. With all, embodiment in historical institutions (called churches) is used as the indispensable means by which to convey their spiritual message widely and to establish it practically as a way of life among men. Yet in accepting institutional embodiment religions have acquired in their trajectory through space-time many historical accretions characteristic of local periods and places. In consequence their content may be distinguished into two parts: (1) *essential truths and counsels*, verities which constitute their basic spiritual appeal and which, according to Toynbee, remain the same in all the higher religions to date; and (2) *non-essential practices and propositions*, that is, products of the

local and temporary cultural patterns with which the essentials are overlaid, and which differ widely from one another.

Considered in their *essentials*, according to Toynbee, all the higher religions agree that man lives in a mysterious universe which he did not create and which he can understand and control only partially. Further,

> Man is confronted by something spiritually greater than himself [a 'spiritual presence'] which, in contrast to Human Nature and to all other phenomena, is Absolute Reality. And this Absolute Reality of which Man is aware is also an Absolute Good for which he is athirst. Man finds himself needing, not only to be aware of It, but to be in touch with It and in harmony with It. That is the only condition on which he can feel himself at home in the world. [P. 265.]

To seek "communion" with this spiritual presence behind phenomena and to bring himself into harmony with it is man's goal; yet to achieve it the human self must get free of self-centredness. And to get rid of his innate self-centredness is the hardest task a man can set himself. If, however, one is able to do it, his reward will be such as to far outweigh all the pain and toil of his spiritual struggle.

> In giving up self-centredness he will have felt as if he were losing his life; but in achieving this act of self-sacrifice he will find that he has really saved his life, because he will have given his life a new centre . . . the Absolute Reality that is the spiritual presence behind the phenomena. [P. 275.]

Here the higher religions speak with one voice. As Aldous Huxley puts it, "Man's final end, the purpose of his existence, is to love, know and be united with the immanent and transcendent Godhead. And this identification of self with spiritual not-self can be achieved only by 'dying to' selfness and living to spirit."[1] In similar vein, Jaspers describes the spiritual foundations derived independently by the great civilizations of the past during the so-called "axial age" which still serve as "islands of light" to mankind.[2]

The last of the essential truths and counsels found by Toynbee common to all the great religions is that "in human life, knowledge is not an end in itself but a means to action." Grasp of truth is valuable only as it serves as a guide for deeds, practice, ways of

[1] Huxley, Aldous, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York, 1945), p. 38. *Cf.* Huxley's Introduction to the *Bhagavad-Gita* (tr. by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, New York, 1945).

[2] Jaspers, Karl, *Way to Wisdom* (New Haven, 1951), pp. 99 ff. While Toynbee, unlike Jaspers and Huxley, omits reference to China, this is presumably because it is the author of no living higher religion, rather than because he questions the presence of essential religious truths in her ancient sages (Laotze, Confucius, Chuangtze, Motze).

living. Yet here he seems open to criticism, for religions like Buddhism clearly place the goal in enlightenment, while Hinduism also regards knowledge as higher than action. Even Toynbee himself allows communion with the divine as man's aim, whereas such beatific vision is surely to be more correctly described as knowledge than as practice. But the most serious objection to his account of the essentials of the great religions is his lack of reference to justice or moral law as an end in itself. While counsels of self-sacrifice and service to others are recommended by him as means of winning harmony with ultimate reality, righteousness for its own sake is not listed as an intrinsic value, categorical imperative, or terminal referent. Rather, religion for Toynbee is focused upon communion with, and love of, the divine, to the relative neglect of justice (reciprocity, measure for measure, equivalence) as a requirement worthwhile in itself. Yet not only, it may be pointed out, is justice latent in the doctrine of karma in Hinduism and Buddhism, but the golden rule appears as a precept in virtually all the great religions.[3] This emphasis upon mystical communion, in our opinion, rather than upon moral and intellectual truth, is one of the motives that leads Toynbee to level and equalize religions. Even though men may desire a faith that will satisfy all sides of their nature—head, heart, and hand,—nonetheless gratification of the intellectual side is not so important in his eyes as the responses of feeling and action. Moreover, the sentiment of conviction, he points out, appears equally absolute in members of different faiths, while judged by their fruits he finds all on a level and none superior in helping its followers to conquer suffering and self-centredness.

Yet if in fact these religions stand on an equal footing, sharing a common essence, how, we may ask, are we to account for their disagreements and disunity? The answer given, as already suggested, places the blame partly on historical cultural differences, and partly on the spirit of exclusiveness, particularly marked in the Judaic religions. While the honest believer in any faith naturally holds that his religion is the way and the truth, he does not necessarily assert knowledge that his is the *only* way or the *whole truth*, and nothing but the truth. Yet the claim to regard their religion as the sole repository of truth, and all those outside it as heathen and infidels, is the besetting sin of the Judaic religions. The cause of this sin, according to Toynbee, lies not merely in spiritual pride and self-centredness, but arises from a confusion of different aspects of truth. Although "it is a matter of indisputable

[3] Swabey, Marie C., *The Judgment of History* (New York, 1954), p. 252 note.

fact that it [truth] shines in all the higher religions and . . . has been the cause of their historical success" (p. 265), yet there has been a difference of opinion as to the type of knowledge in which such religious enlightenment appears. According to Toynbee, truth is disclosed usually as "scientific" or as "poetic truth." In comparing the two, "poetic truth" (which resembles Eddington's "mystical knowledge") is more intuitive, whereas "scientific truth" has to do with what is within the grasp of the intellect. Again "poetic truth" is said to be absolute because static in time, in contrast to "scientific truth" which is relative because cumulative in the time dimension. When poetic insight, arising from a hidden source beyond the intellect (apparently in the subconscious psyche), lays hold of a vision of the whole of truth, it is called *prophecy;* whereas when the intellect at the scientific level obtains such an embracing over-all view, it is called *metaphysics.* Although both fall infinitely short of the plenitude of truth, prophetic visions go farther than scientific metaphysics towards revelation of the mystery of things, to something beyond the intellect's reach. Prophetic utterance can be the expression of a "poetic truth" of unique value "standing by itself and not subject to abrogation, addition or subtraction when confronted with other expressions . . . in other times and places" (p. 126). By contrast, the attempt of metaphysics to present a comprehensive view of "scientific truth" is never more than "an interim provisional report on the general progress of science up to date." Perhaps Plato better than anyone illustrates the union of both kinds of truth, when on reaching the limits of logic and science he so memorably ascends the heights of poetry and myth.

In the end these distinctions serve, Toynbee suggests, to explain the exclusiveness of the Judaic religions, an exclusiveness due not simply to Pharisaical pride, but to the misinterpretation of "poetic truth" as "scientific truth," through subjecting a prophetic poetic intuition regarding the universe to dry factual analysis. This tendency to apply theological metaphysics to the interpretation of religious myths (instead of taking them in a poetic sense) involves an attempt to extend the use of the scientific intellect far beyond its limits. Instead of increasing our light on ultimate reality, such an approach only obscures it—just as "the music of the spheres ceases to be audible when it is transposed into a mathematical scale of numerical ratios" (p. 283). Thus the Judaic religions (especially Christianity) tend to obscure the meaning of their faith by taking theology as intrinsic to religion, whereas neither myths themselves nor the theology into which these poetic insights have been translated are essential to it. In Toynbee's words, since "the

myths themselves are not the essence of a religion, it must follow that the theology into which these myths have been transposed cannot be essential either" (p. 284).

In his explanation of the exclusiveness of the Judaic religions, Toynbee here closely resembles Karl Jaspers, the existentialist, whose account makes use of a very similar distinction between "scientific" and non-scientific truth, save that Jaspers calls non-scientific truth "historical truth" rather than "poetic truth." According to Jaspers, the impulse of Christianity especially to regard its own as the sole authentic vision, as not merely the absolute but the exclusive truth, is due to its confusion of the "historical (existential) truth" of faith with "scientific truth."[4] While "historical truth" won from actual living presents itself to Jaspers as a unique, incontrovertible claim upon the self in faith and action, "scientific truth" by contrast is conditionally universal or hypothetical, but offers no concrete truths by which a man might live. Both Jaspers and Toynbee are agreed that "historical" or "poetic" truth is self-illuminating, indisputable to belief; but because its grounds are beyond rational intelligence, its expression involves myth. Although intellectually inadequate in expression, its dynamism in action serves others as an orientation or as a prototype by which to recognize some light of their own. Scientific truth, on the other hand, is abstract, grasped by the intellect, provisional, cumulative in time. Man by the ambivalence of his nature regards the universe from now one, now the other, of these inseparable yet opposing views. The first takes the universe from the aspect of the self or person, more as it were as a society of selves, while the second sees it rather as a set of waves or particles. But the calamitous claim to exclusive truth, which has blighted the Biblical religions, comes for both Toynbee and Jaspers from confusing the first kind of truth with the second.[5]

[4] Jaspers, Karl, *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy* (tr. by Ralph Manheim, New York, 1949), p. 91: "The absoluteness of historical truth implies the relativity of every formulation of it. . . . The absolute awareness of truth in faith is something fundamentally different from the comprehension of the universal validity of scientifically true propositions, which are always particular. Historical absoluteness does not carry with it the universal validity of its manifestations in word, dogma, cult, ritual, institutions. *It is the confusion of the two that makes it possible to claim exclusivity for a religious truth.*" (Italics mine.)

[5] Of course it is to be understood that Jaspers' term "historical truth" and Toynbee's term "poetic truth" are not completely equivalent. Jaspers uses the term "historical truth" to indicate primarily, apparently, the authentic acquaintance gained in actual existence by *living through* or *enduring* experience. Toynbee's "poetic truth" would seem to emphasize intuitive vision and feeling with perhaps some imagery. When Toynbee occasionally

In the view of a rationalist like the present writer, such a distinction between kinds of truth is in some respects badly drawn. No religious truths, in our opinion, can be shown to be in principle beyond the reach of intellection; if they can, how was Toynbee able to enumerate the "essential truths" of religion in propositional form? Moreover, if once true a truth is timelessly true for all and absolute relatively to its conditions and referent. Instead of "scientific truths" it might be preferable to speak of "truths of fact," thus emphasizing their descriptive, empirical character as involving the integration of the pattern of sensory deliverances with its referent. Similarly, instead of speaking of "poetic" or "historical truths," the phrase "truths of value" might be more apt. These latter, being wider, non-sensory truths, appeal to coherence with a normative principle as their referent. Since visions of beauty, truth, perfection, and the like seem neither sensory perceptions, mere private obsessions, nor groundless beliefs of the nature of "what seems to me is for me," intellection, it would appear, must be recognized as essential to their apprehension. Instead of carrying the mark of their authenticity in sense-organ response, "truths of value" certify themselves by an almost immediate discursive process involved in their very insight. Thus, if we seek to deny a "truth of value," it reaffirms itself in the denial. For instance, to disavow our awareness of truth is to appeal to the truth of the denial; to disavow the absolute is to affirm "absolutely no absolutes," which is self-refuting; to repudiate the possibility of perfection is to concede perfection as the ultimate standard by which its lack is questioned; while to doubt the reality of absolute beauty is to invoke a faultlessly harmonious archetype by comparison with which you attempt to say there is none.[6] Moreover, truth is not tethered to existence or to propositional expression, for that there are forgotten and undiscovered truths, having to do with a past and future non-existent world, is always our fundamental assumption.

Nor is it unscientific (i.e., "poetic" and "historical") truths

uses the phrase "historical truth" himself, he has apparently in mind history as a discipline, and intends to indicate broadly a kind of scientific truth. Yet even this is uncertain, since in his *magnum opus* he describes his method of writing history as a mixture of recording facts, elucidating laws, and the employment of myths or fictions (*A Study of History*, London, 1934, I, C (iii) (e) Annex, pp. 441 ff.).

[6] While of course we may be mistaken as to the particular embodiment *in fact* of a value (my statement "This picture is beautiful" may be false), it is impossible to deny the values themselves (truth, beauty, etc.), which however questioned are always reinstated as genuine. *Cf.* Swabey, M. C., *Logic and Nature*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1955), Ch. IX, Sects. 3–4.

alone that utilize myths and suffer from incomplete expression. On the contrary, all propositionally formulated truths are represented in symbols (graphic signs by which something stands for something else in a constant relation), and so depend on some comparison or analogy to something in the sensible world. However non-sensory, abstract, or intuitive the insights they express, propositions employ graphic representation as their vehicle. Man is everywhere a myth-making animal; therefore some unified pictorial pattern is always invoked in his linguistic communication of a truth, whether as in science it be the solar-system imagery used to convey truth about the atom, his wave and particle analogies in the portrayal of energy, or as in religion fictions like those of the "hand of God," a sky father, or an earth mother.

One of the great errors in religion to which man is prone is not that wrongly described by Toynbee and Jaspers as the mistaken effort to pass off *non-intellectual* as *intellectual* truths, but the error of mistaking *symbols* for *that which is symbolized*. For although the symbols in linguistic communication are sensory, what is symbolized is not always something empirical, but may be something spiritual, transcendent, belonging to another world. The Japanese Buddhists have a saying that a religious book (i.e., a collection of symbols) is like a finger pointing to the moon. The great danger for many believers is to concentrate upon the finger but fail to see the moon. This preoccupation with facts (symbols) to the neglect of the spiritual objects to which they point is, in our view, a major source of deviation from religious truth. In other words, "the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life." As for the tendency to exclusiveness noticeable in the Judaic religions, this, in our opinion, is far from being an unmitigated calamity. It is regrettable only when conducing (as in certain extreme cases in the past) to the denial of all truth whatsoever to other faiths. But today, as not infrequently in former times, such conceptions tend to be outgrown, and the leaders, especially of Christianity, view the religions of the world as constituting an ascending order of spiritual enlightenment, in which other faiths while not wholly blind are consigned to lower levels as compared with the culminating revelation of their own. Here the claim to exclusiveness, instead of arising from mistaking types of truth, stems from the authentic insight that some religions contain more essential truth more clearly distinguished than others, and are thereby preferable and to be rated higher. If this is so, it would be treason to man's inner light to deny their superiority in a foggy inclusiveness which approved all equally without distinction.

In regard to the essentials of religion, we have already given

our opinion that, while the chief living faiths may be said to share those listed by Toynbee if interpreted very widely, nevertheless he does not list *all* of them, notably those concerned with overt recognition of justice or moral law. That to find agreement in essentials such faiths must be taken very broadly is admitted even by Toynbee, who discusses certain marked divergences among them which must be construed as secondary and accidental, if accord is to be affirmed in regard to their basic elements. There is, for instance, the question whether the *spiritual presence* behind phenomena has a *personal* aspect (in a sense akin to that in which the human self is personal). Hinayana Buddhism tended to deny this, but in practice has traveled some distance towards theism. Further, the self to which the different faiths transfer their centre of attachment is: for Mahayana Buddhism, plural (the bodhisattvas); for Hinduism and Christianity, triune; for Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Islam, singular. Granting that the universe has a personal aspect, the additional question arises whether the divine, being endowed with consciousness and will, is the author of evil? Here Hinduism parts company with the others, rejecting the pure goodness of God, and admitting into the Hindu trinity a maleficent Shiva as well as a neutral Brahma beyond good and evil. Lastly, Mahayana Buddhism and Christianity have brought to light something hardly explicit in the other faiths (i.e., the notion of the divine demonstrating its love for men at the cost of its own personal suffering), an idea present in the Christian drama of the cross and in Mahayana in the bodhisattvas refusing to enter Nirvana for the sake of continuing to help their fellow-sufferers in this world.[7] Yet all these differences, in Toynbee's opinion, are secondary and unimportant compared with the major agreement of these faiths on what he regards as the basic essentials.

But if the task of listing the essentials of religion is difficult, that of listing the non-essentials to which he passes next is even more hazardous. Here are concentrated the sharpest divergences of faiths arising from their historical, cultural, and geographical variety. The hope of the future for Toynbee, Jaspers, and others is that with increasing global intimacy and cultural diffusion these disagreements will be outgrown as bars to the spiritual union of mankind. As listed, the non-essentials of the world's religions include: devotion to *holy places or shrines, rituals, tabus, social conventions, myths, and theologies.* At first glance, many of us, recognizing that all of these have been in the past frequent sources

[7] A captious critic might find the same motive of a divine love that accepts suffering present in other religions, as in the story of avatars like Rama and Krishna and certainly in the Hinduism of Gandhi.

of conflict and bitter dispute, would be inclined to agree that they should be discarded in future or at the least frankly admitted as matters of no account. The obvious error in devotion to holy places is that it seems to deny the omnipresence of the divine. Similarly, the error of rituals, tabus, and social conventions is that formalized deportment, "going through the motions," and language behavior take the place of serving one's fellows by good works. Finally, the error of believing in myths and theologies, that is, of accepting man-made romantic tales and dry intellectual formulas as essential, is that of mistaking local, accidental accretions for timeless, spiritual insights.

Nevertheless, on second thought, if as we have argued symbolic expression is necessary for communication among human beings, it might well be that some at least of these so-called non-essential rudiments are necessary for conveyance of religious truths. For if words, imagery, actions, artifacts are needed to transmit a spiritual message, then things like rituals, tabus, myths, and theologies in religion would seem to have an indispensable place. Here, indeed, Toynbee himself appears guilty of contradiction in his attempt to dismiss myths as non-essential, since in his *Study of History* he explained how, from a survey of the great myths in which the wisdom of the race is enshrined,[8] he discovered what he believes to be the key to the divine plan of existence as a process of spiritual creation by a series of responses to challenges involving suffering. While we would agree that any particular myth construed simply as historical fact loses its significance, nevertheless, taken symbolically, in our opinion, it may convey profound spiritual meaning. Thus, stories of creation, incarnation, and tragic suffering may impart insight that the world comes into being according to an orderly plan, the union of body with spirit, and that through sacrifice for others men gain wisdom and entrance into a new life. In this connection it is worth noting that, although since 1938 the Church of England has recognized the creation narratives in Genesis I and II as "mythological in origin" and "symbolic in value,"[9] this has apparently by no means deprived them of their essentiality in its eyes. Granted that any of Toynbee's so-called non-essentials may upon occasion lead men astray (where spiritual meanings are stated in a non-spiritual language), nevertheless these rituals, tabus, and social conventions may also serve as the garb of religious truths, keeping them before our wavering minds bodied forth in a dress

[8] Vol. I, pp. 299 ff. (Also abridgement by D. C. Somervell, New York, 1947, p. 570.)

[9] *New York Times*, Friday, Jan. 14, 1938.

more appropriate than any we ourselves could fashion. Thus, by making use of words and rituals handed down from the past as in the burial and marriage services, men gain more adequate understanding than they could without them of the spiritual meanings at the heart of these experiences. Language and imagery are saviors of spirit; yet they are not enough, we should repeat, without the action of intellection.

While admittedly some myths, rituals, theologies, etc., are cruder and less enlightening than others, and while any given one as a symbol (as distinct from that which is symbolized) may be in time *dispensable*, the use of these to convey cosmic truths regarding the divine presence behind appearances seems *indispensable*. In our view, some forms of rite and social custom definitely express more truth than others. Therefore, when Toynbee lists different types of marriage, such as polygamy and monogamy, as mere non-essentials of social convention, we along with many others would object. The distinction seems more than a matter of accidental usage or cultural heritage; it appears to involve a marked difference in clarity in recognizing human rights and the dignity of the soul. For that respect for personality is greater in monogamy than in polygamy as an institution is hardly disputable, in our opinion, upon reflective examination. Similarly, the negative provisions of the ten commandments, though classed by some writers as mere tabus, plainly express to thoughtful persons essential moral insights. In brief, an undogmatic religion, that is, one without creed or theological content, appears to us hardly worthy of the name. For if, indeed, the notion of the divine is beyond our intellectual grasp, the delineation of its attributes as just, powerful, and wise would seem to be likewise, so that the religious referent becomes scarcely more than a blank. Mere subjective feeling and philanthropic actions without rational check are not enough to provide a faith with marks of truth. Yet admittedly today not a few churches devoting themselves to programs of social service and musical therapy, as it were, bear witness to a faith without metaphysical assertion, confined to feeling and action.

As already suggested, we for our part, while protesting the anti-intellectualism of any attempt to dispense with creed, dogma, or theology, would heartily admit the inadequacy of words and concepts by themselves to embody the full meaning of religion. Always there is the further intuitive element, coupled with the risk of mistaking the symbol for the referent. The danger arises not only because religion involves our craving for the infinite, a transcendent whole to which we finite beings are unequal in com-

prehension, but because religion centers in communion, in fellowship with the divine as a person or *subject*, something not caught in the mesh of general concepts of an *object*. While concepts point to the divine being, communion with the divine as a person, which is something literal not symbolic, remains something realized in intuitive acquaintance. If we are right, and if a developed religion should appeal to the whole man, head, heart, and hand, then theology will always be necessary for the intellect, myths and rituals to satisfy both head and heart, with activities serving our fellows for man's volitional side.

In summary, even though all the great religions aim at one goal (communion with absolute reality), still, we have held, not only do their symbols differ widely in different cultures, but some yield more enlightenment and distinguish truth more plainly than others. These may therefore properly be regarded as superior religions. Their clearer grasp of the spiritual aspect of the universe is shown especially in their greater respect for the dignity of persons, for their individual rights, not merely in religious matters but in relations of property, government, and social life. Here justice no less than love becomes an explicit aspect of faith; fairness, rectitude in handling human affairs, becomes no less necessary than mystical contemplation of the divine. We cannot, therefore, share Toynbee's hope for a new "gospel that will rise above these cultural claims and counterclaims," or, as he says, "for a new society in which there shall be neither Scythian nor Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female, but in which all shall be one in Christ Jesus—or in *Mithra, Cybele, Isis, or one of the bodhisattvas, an Amitabha or perhaps an Avalokita.*"[10]

Any such anticipated world, forfeiting all discrimination of cultures and of the religions woven into their textures, harbors, in our view, a seriously mistaken preference. As we see it, just as it is treason to human intelligence to refuse to distinguish between truth and falsity, justice and injustice, the noble and the base, so it is treason to fail to recognize a scale of values manifest in the world or to decline to discriminate between cultures as more or less successful in embodying them. In different societies spiritual values like the true, the good, the just, the beautiful, and the sacred may have their presence detectable in varying relative amounts by the prevalence of schools and universities, philanthropic institutions, courts of law, works of art, and temples or churches. It can scarcely be doubted that where men are drawn by the vision of a supreme spiritual presence as the goal, they will create new arts,

[10] Toynbee, Arnold, *The World and the West* (Oxford, 1953), p. 95. Italics mine.

forge fresh institutions and techniques, venture discoveries, and dare great deeds in the effort to draw nearer to it. But if such ideas as the sacredness of persons, for instance, be looked upon as just an accident of culture, most of these enterprises will also be taken as passing idiosyncrasies, inexplicable preferences, neither superior nor inferior as achievements,—just different. Where widely varied legal and political notions, as well as patterns of the family, are regarded as just local pecularities, with one no better or worse than another, dictatorship, superstition, and slavery may be tolerated—in contrast to liberty and enlightenment—as merely dissimilar and unlike. While all the great religions allow at least implicitly justice and love as divine attributes, there can be little doubt that the image of deity in some has more resemblance to the despot than to the kindly, fair-minded father or judge. In such cases it is hardly surprising if in such a society there is a lack of justice and amity in human relations. Again, freedom has less scope in some faiths (to be the slave of Allah may seem enough), so that a fatalistic necessity may appear more typical in human life than the liberty of a moral order. Among men moral law is a spiritual principle expressing an obligation to the divine but primarily operative in relation to one's fellows. Unlike physical laws, moral law is sustained by men of good will—justice in society depending on human free choice,—whereas gravity operates regardless of human intentions. Furthermore, unlike physical law, moral law is normative in that it tells us how we *ought* to treat others, rather than being descriptive of how we actually do. So in forthright acceptance of this law, justice, or the golden rule lies the great root of respect for personality as basic to the good society.

In sum, the unrestricted tolerance advocated by Toynbee approaches, as we see it, the indefinite latitude of Hinduism. In Hinduism, the mother of religions, "Whatever is is one; men call it by various names." All faiths are in her eyes equally valid, and Mother India absorbs them all, in what to outsiders may often seem a labyrinthine, featureless monism. "I feel," said Gandhi, "that Indian's mission is different from that of others. *India is fitted for religious supremacy of the world.*"[11] On the walls of the beautiful Gandhi memorial at Madras is inscribed, along with quotations from the great scriptures of the world, Gandhi's statement of his belief that

> all religions were true and that all had some error in them, and that while I hold by my own I should hold others as dear as Hinduism, from which it logically follows that we should hold all as dear as our nearest kith and kin, and that *we should make no distinction between them.*

[11] *The Gandhi Sutras* (arranged by D. S. Sarma, New York, 1949), p. 171.

In the same spirit Rama Krishna is said to have made experiments in adopting successively the disciplines of Islam, Christianity, and that of Kali, and to have realized God in each, from which he concluded the unity and equality of religions.

Yet certainly to hold that two or more basically conflicting religious creeds are true is nonsense. Thus, if indeed Hinduism is right in holding that all other religions are true without distinction, then Christianity is wrong in saying that Jehovah is the one true God. But in that case it follows that Hinduism *is itself wrong* in saying that all religions (including Christianity) are true, since Christianity declares false what it asserts as true. Hence if Hinduism is right in this matter, then Hinduism is wrong, which is the peak of absurdity. Any such tolerance, which seeks to go beyond reason and the laws of logic, and to embrace without repugnance as divine not merely good and evil but truth and falsity, superstition and knowledge, cleanliness and filth, asceticism and license, beauty and ugliness without distinction must be rejected as preposterous. For such lack of discrimination, which treats the foul as fair, the best like the worst, the false like the true, and vice versa, degrades religion and its values, besides making it intellectually ridiculous. Man's deep conviction of unity (that truth is one and God is one) need not force upon him a passivism that stands for anything or a total quietism that accepts whatever is as right. The missionary zeal of the West, albeit it sometimes goes so far as to seek to force its beliefs upon others, testifies not only to clear distinction of a scale of values, but its strong efforts to establish higher values in the existing world. The danger that world domination may be a consequence of the claim to exclusiveness, and that communication with coexistent faiths will remain impossible for a religion claiming superiority as one above the many, is certainly no greater than the danger of the arrival of a world unity that is a sham, in which religious supremacy is held by an all-enveloping faith which, having least to offer, has least to dispute. Such an oecumenical victory, like neutralism in politics, however rhetorically effective, may be only the old device of dodging decision by playing both sides. Better, then, not to abandon, under current fears of nuclear destruction, our belief in different relative rates of progress in different societies in the achievement of religious truth, in the appropriation of social values, and in institutional improvement, even while at the same time we continue our efforts to discriminate the essentials from the non-essentials of faiths in the hope of promoting greater global understanding and agreement.

MARIE C. SWABEY

APTOS, CALIFORNIA

IN DEFENSE OF MORAL ABSOLUTES[1]

1. ***The notion that there are absolutes in morals is unpopular today.*** By the claim that there are moral absolutes I mean the claim that there are statements of the sort "x is right (wrong)" which are true (and can be known to be so) even though there may be some (or even many) who think that they are not true, and which would be true even if the world were to change in just this way that no one any longer thought them true.

There are many ways of denying this claim. One can be a Sceptic or an Explicit Relativist; more sophisticated, one can be an Emotivist or a Concealed Relativist (for example, R. M. Hare[2] and P. H. Nowell-Smith[3]); and so on.

There are many ways of defending it. I want to do so by defending a version of one view as to the nature of moral judgment which has, unfortunately I think, fallen into disrepute in the last few decades.

2. ***The first part*** of my case for the above claim turns on a very simple, but crucial point: that one cannot teach a person (who has not yet the use of any other ethical terminology) the meaning of the expression "x is right"[4] unless one singles out certain acts and says of them, "these are right," and singles out certain others and says of them, "these are not right." Of course we must do other things as well. For example, a child may think we are simply naming objects if we merely point to some object and say, "This is red," and to another and say, "This is not red"; we have in addition to present him with objects and ask him each time "Is this red?" and correct him when he gives the wrong answer. We might call this the "guessing game." And in the case of "right" also the child must become proficient in the guessing game if he is to be said to understand, have the meaning of, the word. But here the guessing game is, as we might say, a more complicated affair. Suppose the child does one of the acts which, had we been playing the guessing game, he would have known was to be called "not right"; if he is now (genuinely) surprised that he is punished for it, he has not learned the meaning of the word. So we say:

[1] I should like to thank Professors Arthur Danto and Sidney Morgenbesser, with whom I have discussed the arguments of the following paper—but who are, of course, not to be identified with the position taken, or with any errors committed in presenting it.

[2] *The Language of Morals.* See, for example, pp. 195–196.

[3] *Ethics.* See, for example, pp. 301–302.

[4] I shall deal here with "right" (in its typically ethical use) alone; but I intend what I say to hold for "good" as well, and I shall ignore the distinctions sometimes made between them.

We must praise (punish) those who do acts which we label "right" ("not right"), and the child has not become proficient in the guessing game unless it is clear that he not only knows which acts are to be labeled "right" ("not right"), but also knows that he (and any agent in question) is expected to do (not do), and will be praised (punished) if he does (doesn't do), acts which are labeled "right" ("not right").

Now it may be objected that although it is necessary to single out some acts and label them "right" if one is to teach the meaning of the word, it is not necessary to single out any particular, given, class so to label. It may be objected that any classes whatever will do, so long as those who do the acts labeled "right" are praised, and those who do the acts labeled "not right" are punished.

Consider an extreme example (adapted from Hare, *op. cit.*, pp. 148–149). Imagine a missionary lands on a cannibal island. The natives praise people who are fierce and who collect large numbers of scalps; it is "gright" to take scalps, they say, and the very opposite of gright to be gentle and peaceable. And imagine the missionary, shocked at these proceedings, says to the cannibals: "It is not right to take scalps; it is right to be gentle and peaceable." Is he disagreeing with the cannibals? One who took the above view would say that he was. But suppose the cannibals were to reply: "Perhaps it isn't right to take scalps (we take your word for that; it's your word, after all); but it certainly is gright to do so." Can the missionary argue that since, when the cannibals say of an act that it is gright, they are commending it, they must then *think* it right to take scalps? No; for they do not think that to take scalps is to be gentle and peaceable. If he has been to Oxford, the missionary may at last find himself saying: "Taking scalps is gright and yet not gright. Gright (if taken descriptively), not gright (if taken evaluatively)." But this paradoxical admission is enough. For if one denies that a difference in descriptive meaning is sufficient to justify the claim that "right" and "gright" do not mean the same, one will think it permissible to claim that taking scalps is not gright (since it is not right), which is a patent falsehood, since taking a scalp is of the very type of act which is called gright in the cannibals' language.

The point I wish to make here, then, is the following: just as, if a man calls a thing "red" when it is blue and he can see it clearly, we are justified in saying that he does not know the meaning of the word, so, if a man calls an act "right" when it is wrong ("borderline cases," as I shall call them, will be dealt with below) and he can see it clearly (see what was in fact done), we are

justified in saying that he does not know the meaning of the word—even if when he says it is right he gives evidence of expecting it to be commended.

But suppose it is said: But how do you know the act *is* wrong? How do you know that you are right and not he? Perhaps *you* are the one who does not know the meaning of the word.

Consider the confusion in: you say that if a man calls a thing "red" when it is blue we are justified in saying that he does not know the meaning of the word—but how do you know it *is* blue? How do you know that you are right and not he? Perhaps *you* are the one who does not know the meaning of the word. (Suppose what is in question is the color of the sky on a clear day in the early afternoon.)

In the case of "right" and "wrong," imagine the following[5]: "I approach a stranger on the street and say to him, 'If you please, sir, I desire to perform an experiment with your aid.' The stranger is obliging, and I lead him away. In a dark place conveniently by, I strike his head with the broad of an axe and cart him home. I place him, buttered and trussed, in an ample electric oven. The thermometer reads 450°F. Thereupon I go off to play poker with friends and forget all about the obliging stranger in the stove. When I return, I realize I have overbaked my specimen, and the experiment, alas, is ruined." There is someone, let us imagine, standing by and watching all this, and he says to us: "You say that what was done here was wrong, but I don't see that it was." His remark begins by making us think that though he has in a sense seen what was done, he has not really seen what was done: he perhaps doesn't know what it is to be struck on the head with the broad of an axe; doesn't know what ovens at that temperature do to objects left in them—thinks perhaps it's like a turkish bath inside there; etc. So we begin by trying to get him to see the act clearly. But now suppose he says, "I can see all you point out, but I still don't see that what was done was wrong," and suppose we are now sure that he has clearly seen the act for what it was. Now it seems to me that there are four possible conclusions we might draw here. *First*, that he is joking, lying, etc.; there are ways of finding this out. *Second*, that he is a moral defective (there are those who, despite all our attempts to teach it to them, just cannot see the difference in moral import between typical

[5] From "The Case of the Obliging Stranger," by William H. Gass, *Philosophical Review*, April, 1957. In this very able and suggestive paper, Professor Gass argues that the type of case dealt with here is "morally transparent"; perhaps he would accept my account as an explication of this phrase, which he does not, unfortunately, go on to explicate himself.

rights and typical wrongs; we might, if the arguments below are granted, call them morally blind, just as others are color blind). *Third* (the second may be considered a special case of the third), that he just doesn't know the meaning of the word "wrong," that what's wanted here is simply that we tell him that the appropriate label for this act in English is "wrong," and perhaps to go on labeling until he can play the guessing game successfully (though eventually we may have to give up). And *fourth*, that he is a philosopher; this will come out if he asks things like, "Mightn't this that was done have consequences of such value to the human race that it will turn out to have been right after all?," or "How do you *know* it is wrong? On what grounds do you base this judgment?" But the answer to the first type of question is simply, "No," for Professor Gass has constructed his case too carefully. (Though we might, of course, come to *say* that it was right.) And what about the second type of question? Our grounds here (just as they would be if we were dealing with the word "red") are—I would stress this—matters of plain fact: that there is, associated with the word "right" in English, a certain habit of application; that calling the above act "right" is not applying the word in accordance with that habit; that one who thinks that "wrong" might not be the correct label for the act just hasn't yet learned (he may never be able to learn it, however) the habit in accordance with which the word is applied. (Or we might put the *same* points in another way: that the word "right" stands for a certain property —a certain moral import—and that the act described above hasn't that property, are matters of plain fact.)

But doesn't this make rightness and wrongness a matter of convention? Not at all. What *is* conventional is that it is the *word* "right" with which this habit is associated (which stands for this property). But "right" has an evaluative as well as descriptive function; don't you make it a matter of convention that we commend acts in accordance with *this* habit (acts which have *this* property) rather than any other? Again, not at all. Commendation in accordance with this habit is justified because in doing so we are commending right acts and only right acts. What better justification for commending an act could there be than the fact (if it is a fact) that it is right?

But that this really does answer the objection may not be clear. So let us repeat. If an act has the property we ascribe when we say (using the words with the meaning they do have in English, and not with some other meaning) "it is right," then it has the property we ascribe when we say (using the words with

the meaning they do have in English, and not with some other meaning) "commendation of it is justified." That this is so is a function of the meanings these expressions do have in English. One who denied or even doubted this would be said not to have caught on to, understood, just what properties we are ascribing to a thing when we say of it "it is right," "commendation of it is justified."

But suppose our use of these expressions changes: suppose we come to use them as the cannibals imagined above, say, would use them. Though the truth of one will still imply the truth of the other, "commendation of x is justified" will no longer stand for the property it now stands for in English (because "x is right" no longer does), and it is the property it *now* stands for in English the presence or absence of which we want to determine in an act. One might as well worry about the possibility that the word "red" might come to mean what the word "white" now means, and vice versa, in which case it will be true to say that all swans are red; swans, however, assuming the facts of nature don't change too, will remain white in the sense of "white" which the word *now* has.

I want to suggest that the apparent gravity of the above objection is due to confusion: we call these and these acts right, and, if they are right, then commendation of them is justified; but how do we know that possession of the property *we* ascribe to a thing when *we* say "it is right" really does make it really right? But it is exceedingly difficult to see what this question means. What property is it about which we are asking whether or not it is present in a thing when we ask whether or not the thing is *really right*—if it is not the property we ascribe to a thing when we say (using the words as they are used) "it is right"? (What property is it about which we are asking whether or not it is present in a thing when we ask whether or not the thing is *really red*—if it is not the property we ascribe to a thing when we say, using the words as they are used, "it is red"?) For if it is not, then with what right is it referred to by the use of the expression "really right"? And if it is, then of course the presence in a thing of the property we ascribe when we say (using the words as they are used) "it is right" really does make it really right.

It follows, then, also, that we need not say that one who commends in accordance with the habit associated, say, with the word "gright" is committing no more than a verbal error. For he commends acts commendation of which is not justified.

3. *But the philosopher will continue:* What *is* this habit (property)? Is it unique? Or is it the same as the habit (property) associated

with (referred to by) some other phrase in the language, say, for example, "would produce the greatest possible happiness for the greatest number," or "is an act I approve of doing," or "is an example of truthfulness, loyalty, helpfulness, friendliness, courtesy, kindness, obedience, cheerfulness, thrift, bravery, cleanliness, or reverence."

If it is unique, how do you detect it in an act? I see it there; when I watch Professor Gass doing what he does to his specimen I see that what he does is wrong. But you don't see it there in the sense in which you see redness in an apple. Why not? What, after all, is seeing redness in an apple other than seeing the apple, and, in virtue of this, knowing that it has the property one has learned to discern in an object in becoming proficient in the guessing game for the word "red"? So, also, seeing wrongness in an act is seeing the act, and, in virtue of this, knowing that it has the property one has learned to discern in an act in becoming proficient in the guessing game for the word "right." But one can point to the redness in an apple! *Can* you point to it other than by pointing to the apple? So why should I have to be able to point to the wrongness in what Professor Gass does as opposed to just pointing to Professor Gass and his specimen? But while the man who is congenitally blind cannot see redness in an apple, he can know that an act is wrong! Quite right; but he can also know that an object is red—for example, we tell him it is a ripe tomato, and he then knows it is red. But I have a way of coming to know that the apple is red (namely, seeing it) which he does not have; however I have no way of coming to know that an act is wrong which he does not have. On the contrary, you do; you can see the act, and he cannot. But he hasn't a sense of the redness of the apple which we do have; whereas he can have a sense of the wrongness, awfulness, of an act. Well, what is it that he is being said not to have when it is said that he doesn't have a sense of the redness of the apple which we do have? A certain visual experience (image)? He doesn't have such experiences of any acts either. But the sense of the wrongness of an act is not a visual experience (image). What is it, then? A feeling of horror? His feelings of horror are surely not what his sense of the wrongness of the act consists in, for he may have exactly the same feelings about snakes. But while he may know that a ripe tomato is red, we can describe an apple to him in every respect but color, and he will still not know whether it is yellow or red, which he could only find out for himself if he could see; on the other hand, once an act has been described in every other respect but moral import, seeing would give him no

more, in the way of deciding whether to say "right" or "wrong," than he already has. This sort of thing is easily and often said; but it is not completely correct. Imagine we have a sun lamp of a sort of which the following is possible: a man asks us to shine it on his face until he turns a smooth even tan—he cannot control it for himself, for he must lie absolutely still, with his eyes closed, during the treatment. We shine it on him for a full hour, smiling gleefully to ourselves, he feeling no pain. Is what we did right or wrong? You can't tell. If you could see his face, bright red at the end of the hour, you'd know. Well, it will be said, the description of the act didn't clearly indicate what was done; until we know either more about the sun lamp, or the color of his face at the end of the hour, we don't know what was done. The question then is: How much describing must we do in order to indicate an act clearly? For surely it is not for no reason that some apples are yellow and some red, even where they are in *many* respects exactly alike. (Of course I do not wish to deny that there is a difference here; see below.)

But I don't discern any such property in an act! If you have acquired the appropriate habit, then you most certainly do; these languages are interchangeable. But all I ask myself about an act is whether or not there are good reasons for doing it! This *is* asking whether or not it has the property under discussion.

How can rightness and wrongness be properties of acts when there is so much disagreement about whether a given act is right or wrong; there is no comparable disagreement as to redness. Now I want to say: of course there is a difference between "right" and "red," but it need in no way be regarded as obscure. The difference will come out if we examine carefully the objection indicated in the first sentence of this paragraph; the difference I want to point to is, I suggest, the source of all the hesitation we feel about calling rightness a property.

To begin with, where is there such disagreement in the case of moral import? Not, this is to be stressed, over typical rights and wrongs, of which the act described by Professor Gass is an example. The discussion between the missionary and the cannibal imagined above should make this clear to us. The cases we shall be concerned with in this section are such as Jones's having left his wife because she had, for fifteen years, nagged him about his lack of initiative. Some may think what Jones did wrong; others may think it right; others may be undecided. Now I want, to complete my analogy, to call these "borderline cases."

While deciding what to call borderline colors rarely matters to

most of us, there are those to whom it does matter—some scientists, for example, and also, perhaps, some artists, dress designers, etc. But the striking fact about the procedure of these people with respect to borderline colors is that they do *not* conclude by deciding that this or that borderline color is red or orange; the scientist, where he needs to specify colors exactly, does so, perhaps, by assigning them a numerical rating (perhaps the amounts of red, green, and blue light which, when mixed, will reproduce the given sample); the artist casts about for one of the already existing terms for borderline colors, and where there is none which fits exactly, may invent a new one.

In the case of borderline acts, however, we have no numerical scales or borderline terminology—and what good would it do us if we had them? What we want to know is whether or not an act is right, and of any numerical rating or new label the question would only arise again: Is an act with this rating, this label, right or wrong, or ethically neutral? Why would the question only arise once again here, while it does not arise in the case of borderline colors? Because of the "ought-implying"[6] nature of ethical ascriptions; because, other things being equal, an act which it would be right for me to do is an act which I ought to do; and because there are situations in which I am faced with a choice, and I want to know which of the possible actions open to me is the one I ought to do. This is the source of the difference between "red" and "right."

For suppose, difficult though it may be to suppose it, that it became of critical importance that we decide on borderline colors; suppose a connection of color terminology with actions in some such way as, for example, that if a light is red we are to do A, but that if it has shifted to orange, we are not to do A, and suppose A is an act with important consequences, and that we have to make the decision often—as often, perhaps, as we now find ourselves asking whether or not it would be right for us to do this or that. And now suppose that the light is (as we should now say) somewhere between red and orange. How shall we decide which to say, "red" or "orange"?

We may turn to the scientists and the artists. From the former, we learn that the color of the light is, say, *xyz;* from the latter that it is, say, brick-colored. But this doesn't help us. We want to know whether it is red or orange, for we want to know whether or not to do A.

However, we can construct criteria for deciding whether to say

[6] See Moore, "Reply to My Critics," *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, ed. by P. A. Schilpp, pp. 603–605.

"red" or "orange" from the specification techniques of the scientists and the artists: for example, we order the ratings in some way, and then draw a line on the scale, those colors whose ratings fall above the line, say, to be called "red," and those below it to be called "orange." And we might, if A were very important, begin to construct still further and entirely new criteria.

This does not mean that the word "red" would then mean something different from what it formerly meant: no more than any of us now, would one who used the new criterion be prepared to conclude that a color which he can see is red, is orange. No criterion will be admitted as both relevant to the use of the word "red" and correctly applied if the result of applying it is that typical reds are classified as orange, and vice versa. And further, connected with this, we may say that although the result of applying two or more different criteria to a given borderline case may at first sight appear to differ, we shall not, in the last analysis, allow the results of applying them at one and the same time to be relevant, correct, and to conflict either with each other or with our final conclusion that the color is or isn't red or orange. The disputes which may arise over borderline cases due to the use of apparently conflicting criteria—and many such disputes may now arise, given the importance of A—would be settled (insofar as they are settled) by arguments to the effect that one or another of the criteria is either irrelevant or incorrectly applied; for we cannot allow a criterion to be relevant and then proceed to ignore the results of applying it.

Now I want to say, then: there are no more borderline acts than there are borderline colors; we are no more uncertain as to how to classify them, and no more uncertain as to whether or not we are uncertain as to how to classify them. It is just in the way we deal with them that the difference lies: in the case of the latter, since there is no connection with action, we do not care which we say, "red" or "orange" or "*xyz*" or "brick-colored"; in the case of the former, since there is a connection with action, we do care, and so we go on disputing.

In the case of the moral predicates, we have criteria already at hand to help us decide borderline cases: for example, the utilitarian, the will of God, certain feelings, and so on. We also have the so-called ethical principles and maxims: honesty is the best policy, and so on. And we can make (as we did above with borderline colors) two points about their use: *first*, that no one of them is such that the result of correctly applying it is that typical rights are classified as wrong, and vice versa, nor will any criterion be accepted as relevant to the rightness of an act if this requirement

is not met—if a suggested criterion is satisfied by evil acts, and not satisfied by right ones, it cannot then be a criterion for the use of the word "right," meaning by that word what we do mean by it. It is of interest to notice here that, if one agrees with this first point, one is agreeing that the search for grounds for the claim that x is right or wrong (where x is a typical right or wrong) is a mistaken one: satisfaction of criterion C by some typical right does not prove that that typical right really is right; on the contrary, this proves, rather, that, to this extent at least, criterion C is relevant to rightness, and hence may justifiably be used in deciding borderline cases. (See the second type of philosopher's question above.) And *second*, we may say that although the results of applying them may at first sight appear to conflict, we shall not, in the last analysis, allow the results of applying them at one and the same time to be relevant, correct, and to conflict with each other or with our final conclusion that the act in question is or isn't right. The interesting consequence of this second point about the use of the sort of criteria under discussion is that to agree to it is to agree that dispute over the question whether or not the naturalistic fallacy is a fallacy is futile. The question whether or not a suggested criterion for rightness, say C, is necessarily connected with rightness, the question whether or not "right" *means* C, is a question to which both answers, though to an extent right, will mislead us. We can say that the connection *is* a necessary one—pointing to the fact that any appearance of conflict can be explained away (if it is said that x is right, but does not produce the maximum pleasure, say, a case can be made either for the claim that x does produce the maximum pleasure, or for the claim that x is not so clearly right as was at first sight supposed); i.e., we need never allow "x is C, but x is not right." But if we do say this, then we shall be making it as difficult to justify the claim that x is C as it is to justify the claim that x is right—and it was to eliminate this latter difficulty that we set out to find criteria for "right" in the first place.[7] And that there should be as much trouble in justifying the former claim as in justifying the latter claim, where they are taken as necessarily connected, should really have been expected; for, if the case in question is a borderline case, i.e., is one which is not clearly like the typical rights or wrongs, then there cannot be clearly present in it some property (whatever it may be) from which it *follows* that it is like the typical rights or wrongs. Or we can say that the connection between "right" and "C" *is not* a necessary one—pointing to the fact that there is, in many cases, a strong

[7] See, for example, Mill's remarks as to his purpose in writing *Utilitarianism* (beginning of Chapter I).

appearance of conflict, a strong temptation to say "x is C but is not right" (a temptation we never feel in the case of, say, "x is red but is not colored"), which needs to be overcome by explaining away the appearance that x is C or that x is not right. But if we do say this, then we shall have failed to see how close the connection really is between rightness and C, and how, without undue straining, the appearance of conflict *can* be explained away.

And just as each criterion has this close, though perhaps not necessary, connection with rightness, so they have the same close, though perhaps not necessary, connection with each other. There is the very same oddness about "x would produce the greatest possible happiness for the greatest number, but x is against God's will" and "x is the most charitable, honest, just alternative open to me, but I do not approve of doing x" as there is about "x would produce the greatest possible happiness for the greatest number, but x is not right" and "x is the most charitable, honest, just alternative open to me, but it would not be right for me to do x."

Why is there this peculiarly close, though perhaps not necessary, connection between the criteria and the conclusion, and amongst the criteria? Because there are borderline cases over which we must decide; to do this we constructed a whole set of criteria (questions as to moral import are that important), and then found that the criteria appeared to give conflicting results, though all appear relevant. If we suddenly found ourselves in the situation imagined above, we should no longer, I suggest take so easily to the claim that the connection between redness and a certain wave-length, say, is simply synthetic—for we should probably, that is, begin to make use of what the scientists tell us about wave-lengths as a criterion for redness in borderline cases. But as we do not in fact find ourselves in that situation, we are not in the least tempted to claim that "red" does not stand for a unique property, or is "supervenient" or "consequential," and not in the least tempted to ask for the grounds for calling a typical red "red"—temptations many have found irresistible in the case of "right." Of course, the facts being what they are, this is not without excuse. But unfortunately the consequence of yielding to this strong temptation in the case of "right" has been that the strength of the claim made in the first paragraph of this paper has been overlooked. In the very same way as it had, we might say, been overlooked how very odd it is to present arguments from which it appears to follow that we haven't got two hands, and didn't have breakfast before we had lunch.

JUDITH JARVIS

BARNARD COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

OBJECTIVE EMOTIVISM

I

IT is a common belief among many contemporary philosophers that a non-cognitive or emotive analysis of moral judgments, namely, the view that moral judgments are expressions of emotion and can be neither true nor false, implies a theory of ethical relativism, namely, the view that right and wrong depend upon the personal caprice of individuals. It is surely the case, they argue, that if moral judgments cannot even be true or false, then there can be no objective standards for determining right or wrong actions. This contention initially is quite convincing. However, in this paper I will argue that non-cognitivism does not necessarily imply ethical relativism. Although some forms of non-cognitivism do involve one in ethical relativism, non-cognitivism need not so involve one. This is the case unless one prescriptively defines non-cognitivism as analytically entailing ethical relativism.

In arguing this contention I will make use of what I consider to be a historical example of an emotivist or non-cognitivist who is also an ethical objectivist. That objective emotivist is Francis Hutcheson, who, although historically overshadowed by Hume, may be justly called the father of the empiricist school of ethical theory in eighteenth-century Britain.[1]

II

There is little doubt that many philosophers do believe that there is a necessary connection between emotivism or non-cognitivism and ethical relativism. One needs only to look at recently published articles concerning ethics. For example, Frederick Olafson remarks that "though one can continue to be for the same things, no matter what view I adopt of the nature of moral judgment," nonetheless if one adheres to a non-cognitive analysis of moral judgments, one is "obliged to repossess them (moral judgments), as it were, not as the common moral furniture of the universe but as our own acts and choices for which we alone bear final responsibility."[2] Mr. Olafson states the logical relation which he

[1] See my Ph.D. dissertation, *The Ethics of Francis Hutcheson* (Duke University, 1957). My interpretation of Hutcheson is based on an analysis of his four principal works: *An Enquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions, with Illustrations upon the Moral Sense; A System of Moral Philosophy;* and *A Short History of Moral Philosophy.*

[2] Frederick Olafson, "Meta-Ethics and the Moral Life," *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 65, April, 1956, p. 74.

thinks holds between a non-cognitive analysis of moral judgments and ethical relativism less metaphorically when he says that a non-cognitive analysis "rules out any use of the factual model for interpreting moral validity and provides no new means by which we can express an order of values that is not merely individual."[3] Surely this is an assertion that non-cognitivism logically entails ethical relativism.

Olafson is not the only contemporary philosopher who thinks that non-cognitivism entails ethical relativism. J. D. Mabbott, who apparently equates "emotivism" and "subjectivism," writes of the emotive theory: "The basic difficulty of subjectivism is that it makes any person's approval as valid as that of anyone else. This reduces the moral world to a chaos of caprice and infinite variation. For it is not only each man which is the measure of all things moral but each moment in each man's life."[4]

III

In the light of the manner in which the emotive theory is often formulated, Olafson and Mabbott's criticisms are not only understandable but valid. For example, Stevenson, one of the principal exponents of the emotive theory, tells us in his famous "first pattern analysis" that value judgments (which are to be analyzed as "I approve of *x*; do so as well") are never incorrect; for if a person at time *t*1 asserts that "*x* is good" and later at time *t*2 (after discussion and inquiry) asserts that "*x* is bad," that person has not shown that his judgment at *t*1 was mistaken. It is this sort of analysis of value judgments that leads Mabbott to remark that the emotive theory commits one to the view that it is not only each man which is the measure of all things moral but each moment in each man's life.

Stevenson further remarks that whatever reasons are set forth to support or attack value judgments are "related to them psychologically, rather than logically."[5] In fact, "any statement about any matter of fact which any speaker considers likely to alter attitudes may be adduced as a reason for or against an ethical judgment."[6] Reasons which are offered to justify value judgments "represent efforts to change attitudes, or to strengthen them by means of altering beliefs. Hence, although the reasons themselves are of an empirical character and may be rendered probable or

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] J. D. Mabbott, "True and False in Morals," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1948–49, Vol. 49, p. 112.

[5] Charles Stevenson, *Ethics and Language*, p. 115.

[6] *Ibid*, p. 114.

improbable by scientific methods, one must not say that they render the ethical judgments probable or improbable in the same sense. They are simply of a sort that may lead one person or another to have altered attitudes in consequence of altered beliefs, and so, thereafter, to make different ethical judgments."[7]

In cases of ethical disagreement which Stevenson discusses, the disputants do not attempt to discover whose attitude or approval is appropriate or correct. Rather the procedure which they use to resolve their disagreement is that of trying to *change* one another's attitude. When the disputants agree in attitude, the ethical disagreement is "settled." No consideration is given to the possibility that the attitudes of the disputants, even when they are in agreement, may be incorrect or inappropriate.

Ayer, another exponent of emotivism, can be interpreted in the same manner as Stevenson. He tells us that "what are accounted reasons for our moral judgment are reasons only in the sense that they determine attitudes."[8] That is, any reason which is causally efficacious in exciting an attitude as expressed in a moral judgment is a justifying reason for that attitude. In the same manner as Stevenson, Ayer obliterates the distinction between reasons which justify and reasons which excite or cause attitudes or behavior.

Emphasizing these crucial passages from leading ethical emotivists, one can legitimately infer that at least some emotive theories are theories of ethical relativism; for what both Stevenson and Ayer tell us is that *any* reason which alters or determines an attitude of approval or disapproval as expressed in a moral judgment justifies that attitude. This implies that there are no standards by virtue of which attitudes as expressed in moral judgments are to be judged. Any moral judgment or attitude which is caused is by virtue of the fact that it is caused also justified.

IV

However, an ethical emotivist or non-cognitivist need not be committed to the above consequences. It is our contention that Hutcheson's type of emotivism, with minor modifications, is not a theory of ethical relativism. For Hutcheson, certain reasons which determine or alter attitudes of moral approval or disapproval also justify those attitudes; but other reasons which determine moral attitudes do not justify those attitudes. Those reasons which both determine and justify moral approval and disapproval Hutcheson calls "justifying reasons." Those reasons which determine at-

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 118.

[8] A. J. Ayer, "On the Analysis of Moral Judgments," *Horizon*, September, 1949, p. 178.

titudes but do not morally justify them, he calls "exciting reasons." On Hutcheson's emotive theory, reasons are related to moral attitudes as expressed in moral judgments in a logical as well as a psychological manner. Reasons may be psychologically efficacious, that is, effectively evoke a moral approval or disapproval, and yet not justify that approval or disapproval. Because Hutcheson makes this important distinction between justifying and exciting reasons, he is not committed to the moral subjectivism or relativism to which Mabbott and Olafson make reference. This is the case even though moral judgments for Hutcheson are non-cognitive expressions of emotion. On the other hand, emotivists of the Stevenson-Ayer variety, who neglect this important distinction between justifying and exciting reasons, are open to the accusation that they are ethical subjectivists or relativists.

V

Before setting forth our proposed theory of objective emotivism, attention must be called to our modification of Hutcheson's emotivism. The modification which we introduce is the notion of "contextual implication," a notion utilized by some contemporary philosophers, notably P. H. Nowell-Smith.[9] This notion is important in making compatible Hutcheson's non-cognitivism and his emphasis on justifying reasons and standards for moral approval and disapproval. Our concern is primarily that of setting forth an emotive or non-cognitive ethical theory which is objective, that is, which denies that right and wrong depend on the personal caprice of individuals. Accurate historical interpretation is not our primary concern. In spite of this crucial modification we will continue to speak of the theory as that of Hutcheson.

The notion of "contextual implication," by virtue of which we supplement Hutcheson's theory, is defined by Nowell-Smith in this manner: "I shall say that a statement P contextually implies a statement Q if anyone who knew the normal conventions of the language would be entitled to infer Q from P in the context in which they occur." To distinguish contextual implication from logical implication, Nowell-Smith offers this example: "If Jones says 'It is raining,' Smith is entitled to infer that Jones believes that it is raining although 'Jones believes that it is raining' clearly does not follow logically from 'It is raining.' Conversely, there is no contradiction between 'It is raining' and 'Jones believes that it is not raining,' yet it would be logically odd for Jones to say 'It is raining but I do not believe it is.'"[10]

[9] P. H. Nowell-Smith, *Ethics* (Pelican Book), London, 1954, p. 81.
[10] *Ibid.*

Nowell-Smith sets forth several rules of contextual implication, but unlike the rules of logical implication, they can all be broken without the speaker being involved in self-contradiction. One of the rules of contextual implication offered is that "a speaker contextually implies that he has what he himself believes to be good reasons for his statement." If a speaker makes a statement like "He plays a great game of tennis," then (unless the speaker utilizes special language devices to indicate that he has not any reasons for making this statement) the speaker contextually implies that he is prepared to offer reasons for his statement. If he is unable to offer reasons for his statement, then he has made a logically odd statement, though not a self-contradictory one.

It is by the use of this sense of "implies" that we wish to modify Hutcheson's ethics. When one utters a moral judgment, one contextually implies that one believes that one has reasons for his judgment, reasons which justify that judgment. Of course the utterance of a moral judgment may have many other contextual implicates. For example, in a familial setting in which the judgment "John ought to do x" is uttered, the speaker may contextually imply not only that he believes that there are justifying reasons for John's doing x, but also that John ought to do x at a certain time and that all members of the family think John ought to do x. However, we want to maintain that considerations about one implicate, namely, the belief that one's moral judgment is justified, are necessary and sufficient for determining whether the moral judgment is justified.

VI

We are now in a position to set forth Hutcheson's objective emotivism as modified by our use of the notion of "contextual implication." On this objective emotive theory, when one utters a moral judgment, one *expresses but does not state* one's moral approval or disapproval and one contextually implies that one believes that one has good reasons for this expression of approval or disapproval. One tests the appropriateness or inappropriateness (not truth or falsity) of moral approvals by discovering whether one of the contextual implicates of the moral utterance, namely, the belief that one's moral judgment is justified, is justified or not justified. The belief is justified if the proposition believed, namely, "My moral judgment is justified," is probably true or false or probably corresponds with fact.

Let me state this test of the appropriateness of moral approvals in more detail and more exactly. A moral judgment expresses an attitude toward an act and contextually implies among other things that one believes that that attitude is justified. A moral judgment

is justified by determining whether or not the proposition toward which one has an attitude of belief is probably true or false. That proposition is: "My moral judgment is justified." If this proposition is verified as probably true, then the attitude of belief toward that proposition is appropriate. If one's attitude of belief toward the proposition that one's moral judgment is justified is shown to be appropriate, then the moral attitude expressed by the moral judgment is shown to be appropriate. That is, the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the contextual implicate of a moral judgment, namely, the belief that one's moral judgment is justified, determines the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the moral attitude expressed by the moral judgment.

Take this example. B utters in context C: "Joe's doing act A is right." This judgment expresses B's attitude toward Joe's doing A. B's utterance in context C contextually implies that B believes that his attitude expressed by his judgment about Joe's doing act A is justified. To justify the contextual implicate of the moral utterance, it is necessary to show that what B believes is probably true. B believes that his attitude expressed by his moral utterance about Joe's doing A is justified. This belief is shown to be justified by asking if there is evidence which shows it to be true. Hutcheson is a hedonistic utilitarian. That an act will probably contribute in the long run to the greatest happiness of the greatest number is a necessary condition for the rightness of an act. If there is evidence that Joe's doing A will probably procure the greatest happiness of the greatest number, then B's belief, that his attitude (expressed by his moral judgment) is justified, is justified. If this belief, i.e., the contextual implicate of the moral judgment, is justified, then the attitude expressed by the moral judgment is justified.

In the light of the account of justification which we interpret Hutcheson as holding, it is not inappropriate to label him as an ethical objectivist. It is true that moral judgments for him are non-cognitive. They express the "pro" or "anti" attitude of the utterer. But moral judgments are not uttered to call attention to the psychological state of the utterer. In uttering a moral judgment one does express one's psychological state and one's desire that those to whom one is speaking adopt the same attitudes of approval or disapproval that one is expressing. However, one also contextually *implies* that one believes that one has reasons which support one's judgment, and if one is challenged to give reasons and cannot give any, his utterance, if it is not to be regarded as sheer nonsense, is to be regarded as peculiar, and certainly as not justified. In other words, when one utters a moral judgment,

one contextually implies that he believes his attitude is a *reasonable* or justified attitude. Since moral judgments can be shown to be justified or not justified by reference to data which are independent of the attitude of the utterer of the judgment, i.e., by reference to information which is subject to empirical verification or falsification, Hutcheson, in spite of the fact that moral judgments for him are non-cognitive, can legitimately be labeled an ethical objectivist. If Hutcheson can be labeled as an ethical objectivist, then one can be an ethical objectivist and yet maintain a non-cognitive analysis of moral judgments. This is the case even though some philosophers apparently think that a cognitive analysis of moral judgments is a necessary condition for ethical objectivism.

Hutcheson's ethical theory is like the emotive theory to the extent that one of the principal functions of a moral judgment is to express a "pro" or "anti" attitude toward an act. But it is like an ethical objectivist theory in that the "pro" or "anti" attitudes can be appropriate or inappropriate, this appropriateness or inappropriateness depending upon the verification or falsification of statements of fact.

VII

The proximity of Hutcheson's theory to at least some types of ethical objectivism and the respect in which he differs from them can be shown by briefly stating the analysis of moral judgments held by a contemporary ethical objectivist, Charles A. Baylis. Professor Baylis holds that a moral judgment is cognitive and that it *asserts* that an act is worthy of preference. In order for a moral judgment or assertion of preferability to be true, he tells us, there must be good reasons which justify the assertion. In fact, for Professor Baylis, the statement that an act is preferable analytically entails that there are good reasons for one's preference. He specifically tells us that the normative meaning of any moral judgment like "X is right" includes the inferences justified, one of which is that it is reasonable to perform X.[11] In other words the assertion, "X is right," includes analytically in its meaning the assertion, "The performance of X is justified." However the assertion, "X is right," or "X is worthy of preference," is not to be regarded as analytically *equivalent* to the assertion, "The performance of X is justified."

For Professor Baylis the moral judgment, "X is right," is empirically confirmable or disconfirmable by discovering whether the performance of X is justified, i.e., by confirming or disconfirm-

[11] Charles Baylis, "Empirical Grounds for Normative Ethical Statements," a paper presented at a meeting of the Fifth Inter-American Congress of Philosophy in Washington, D. C., on July 12, 1957.

ing the analytic entailment of "X is right." Moral judgments for him can be known to be probably true or false. For example, on Professor Baylis's theory, B's moral judgment, "Joe's doing act A is right," *asserts* or states a proposition which is true or false, as well as expresses B's attitude toward Joe's doing act A. The judgment asserts that Joe's doing A is worthy of preference. That Joe's doing A is worthy of preference is verified or falsified by verifying or falsifying an analytic entailment of "Joe's doing A is worthy of preference." That entailment is that the performance of A is reasonable or justified. Let us suppose that Professor Baylis is a hedonistic utilitarian and that a necessary condition for the rightness of an act is that that act will probably contribute the greatest happiness to all concerned. If it could be shown that Joe's doing A will probably contribute the greatest happiness to the greatest number, than the analytic entailment of the moral judgment, i.e., Joe's doing A is justified, is shown to be probably true. The probable truth of this analytic entailment of the moral judgment renders the moral judgment itself probably true.

Accepting my interpretation of Hutcheson, Hutcheson differs from Professor Baylis's analysis of moral judgments to this extent: (1) he denies that moral judgments are cognitive or assertive; (2) he denies that they *analytically entail* the assertion that the performance of the act approved is reasonable or justified. However, for Hutcheson, the utterer of a moral judgment *implies in the context* in which he makes his utterance that he believes that his utterance is reasonable or justified. A moral utterance is shown to be appropriate or inappropriate (but not true or false) by showing that the contextual implicate of the utterance, namely the belief that the performance of X is reasonable or justified, is appropriate or inappropriate. The belief is shown to be appropriate or inappropriate by verifying as probably true or false that proposition believed.

The principal difference between an ethical objectivist like Professor Baylis and Hutcheson's emotivism seems to be that of whether a moral judgment *asserts*, that is, is a statement which can be true or false, or whether a moral judgment is non-cognitive but does, when it is uttered, contextually imply a belief that a cognitive utterance, namely, "The performance of X is reasonable or justified," is true. We have here a case of disagreement in belief about what is the proper or correct analysis of moral judgments. The problem is how either of the disputants can justify his belief that his analysis is the proper one. Of course, a thorough consideration of this problem lies well beyond the scope of this paper.

In the case of Professor Baylis and Hutcheson, it seems to me that both analyses pretty closely fit the ordinary usage of moral terms in moral argument. Both analyses account for the emotive and persuasive aspects of moral utterances. Both hold that opposing moral judgments *involve* mutual incompatibilities, and this, it seems to me, is normally held to be so in cases of moral disagreement. However, Hutcheson accounts for the mutual incompatibility involved in moral judgments by virtue of the contextual implicate of the judgment. The proposition believed when one utters a moral judgment may be probably true or false and contradict another proposition believed. But moral judgments themselves cannot contradict. They express a moral emotion. Baylis, on the other hand, accounts for the mutual incompatibility involved in moral judgments in a different manner. Opposing moral judgments may contradict one another, for a proposition is an analytic entailment of a moral judgment for Baylis.

Whatever be the basis of the disagreement between two disputants who accept respectively cognitive and non-cognitive analyses of moral judgments, it is to be kept in mind that neither the cognitive nor the non-cognitive analysis necessarily entails either ethical objectivism or ethical relativism. One could hold a cognitive analysis of moral judgments (X is right = df. "I approve of X") and yet be an ethical subjectivist and relativist; and one can hold a non-cognitive analysis of moral judgments and yet be an ethical objectivist as in the case of Hutcheson. Practically no changes in one's ethical theory need be entailed by one's adherence to either analysis.

WILLIAM THOMAS BLACKSTONE

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

ASCRIPTIONS AND APPRAISALS

I

CONSIDER a piece of dialogue like this, which one might overhear at any time: "It was a terrible thing for her to do." "Can you blame her?" "Why not?" "Think of the kind of home she came from. She didn't see anything wrong with what she did." "Yes. I suppose you're right. Still, it's a mess anyway you look at it."

In this little piece of dialogue there is implied an appeal to a distinction which I wish to analyze. It is a distinction which we

all constantly use in our ordinary ethical talk, and in simple cases we use it consistently without being able to give—or needing—any account of what we are doing. In certain perhaps more complicated but no less important circumstances, however, we commonly tend to become inconsistent, and our language both reflects inconsistencies in our sizing up of the situation and encourages us in falling into further contradictions which a different way of speaking might have prompted us to avoid.

Unfortunately, this analysis cannot be carried on simply by means of an examination of the contrast between the ways in which we use certain ethical words and expressions and the ways in which we use others, since part of my purpose is to draw attention to the fact that we do not possess *any* ethical words and expressions which are always used with one of the two kinds of force which I want to distinguish. Purely for convenience, I shall speak of the distinction as being that between using ethical words and expressions to make ascriptions of responsibility and using them to 'appraise' states of affairs. In so doing I am giving 'ascribing' and 'appraising' special restricted senses, but wherever in this article 'ascribing' and 'appraising' appear, they are used in such a way that they could be replaced by the detailed accounts which will be offered of the different sorts of ethical judgment at issue. As a matter of fact, the usage of 'ascribing' and 'appraising' in this paper seems to correspond pretty closely to one of the ways in which each of these words is most commonly used, but in any case, any reader who objects to my distinguishing in this way between ascriptions and appraisals may read the distinction as being simply between say 'A-type uses' and 'B-type uses' of ethical words.

Crudely, we 'ascribe' *responsibility* to a person whereas we appraise any number of things about him: his performances, his talents, his dispositions, the effects of his surroundings upon him, what he has become, his whole state—without specifying for how much of this he is responsible. Furthermore we can appraise all sorts of things other than people: the devastation produced by hurricanes, the climate of the South of France, a Greek play, a statute, a political institution.

Yet ascriptions and appraisals are both instances of ethical uses of language: ascriptions both say that someone is responsible and convey an evaluation. Appraisals evaluate a situation without assigning any responsibility. This must be elaborated. There is a sense of ascription in which to ascribe responsibility is merely to claim "he was responsible for that action," without attaching any

praise or blame for the action's having been done.[1] This, however, is not what I intend: by an ascription I mean the sort of judgment which both assigns responsibility and gives praise or blame. Such a judgment is clearly ethical. On the other hand, an appraisal in my sense is also quite definitely an ethical use of language, which nevertheless ascribes no responsibility, involves no praise or blame. Some of the most ancient and typical of all ethical utterances are of this type—for instance, "knowledge is a greater good than pleasure," "pain as such is evil."

Let us now examine the ways in which we normally decide whether a putative ascription really is warranted. Suppose someone makes a remark like, "How *could* he have given away top secret information?," and his hearer replies, "He just didn't know," and goes on to establish this beyond dispute.

Now the first speaker will withdraw his putative ascription and make some other comment such as: "Well, he's not to blame but I still wouldn't want to be in his shoes."

A putative ascription will always be *withdrawn* upon a certain sort of factual evidence being produced. If an ethical judgment is held in abeyance pending the production of this sort of evidence, then it is not an appraisal, for an appraisal is not concerned with *how* any state of affairs came about or with who is responsible—if anyone. On the other hand if a state of affairs is described or describable as wholly due to any circumstance for which no one is responsible, then an ethical judgment about this state of affairs cannot be or imply an ascription.

It is important to see that this holds whatever the state of affairs is due to. This can be seen quite simply if it is realized that an ascription will always be withdrawn if someone can show that the person was not responsible for the state of affairs at issue, irrespective of what sort of pressure forced it upon the person concerned. We do not impute praise or blame to the results of any circumstances affecting people, for which they are not responsible; immediately we suspect the existence of such a mistake we withdraw any ascription we had been prepared to make, pending a new judgment.

Thus ascriptions are what has been called *defeasible* in that they will be withdrawn upon production of various different sorts of evidence, while attempts to characterize the sorts of evidence relevant[2] come up against the difficulty that the latter often have not

[1] See H. L. A. Hart, "The Ascription of Responsibility and Rights," in *Logic & Language*, First Series, ed. by A. G. N. Flew.

[2] Such an attempt will be made in a paper, "Scarcity and the Concepts of Ethics," *Philosophy of Science*, October, 1958.

got much in common besides this capacity of defeating putative ascriptions.

Something has now to be said about why it is that certain of our everyday ethical expressions do not accurately reflect the distinction between ascribing and appraising. Do we not always use words like 'moral,' 'responsible,' 'dutiful,' in order to make what have here been called ascriptions?

It may be admitted at once that although all our usual ethical words are employed in making both ascriptions and appraisals, some are typically used for one or the other of these two tasks. Indeed it can be shown that there are a few expressions which are so markedly adapted for one or other of these uses that it is tempting to say that when they are used in the other way language suffers. It is, for example, certainly true that words like 'moral,' 'duty,' 'obligation,' 'culpable,' 'conscientious,' 'guilty,' 'praiseworthy,' 'wicked,' 'well-intentioned,' and the like are primarily used in making ascriptions, whereas words like 'fine,' 'noble,' 'tragic,' 'good' are primarily used in making appraisals.

Yet correct English sentences can be constructed in which words like 'moral' can be used in what are clearly appraisals, but in which they are qualified by other words whose point requires that the judgments be ascriptions of responsibility. An instance of this is offered in the following: Someone is discussing the causes of delinquency: "By the time he was sixteen he was already a person of completely vicious character and it is not an exaggeration to say that you could find nothing but blame for almost all his actions. I am certain that his slum environment was totally responsible for his behavior."

Sometimes a single short sentence or one expression is used to convey both an appraisal and an ascription, telescoped together. This need not involve confusion. The one sentence may express a complex judgment; it may be used as a way of conveying both the points to which the speaker wishes to draw attention. When someone says, "What a dreadful thing to do!," or "That was a really disgusting piece of behavior," he may, among other things, be both making an unfavorable appraisal of a state of affairs and ascribing blame for it.

Trouble arises when similar expressions and sentences are used on occasions when they could not legitimately be expanded into the conjunction of an appraisal and an ascription, while their familiar form leads hearer—and perhaps speaker also—to assume just this combined force. The confusions noted above in uses of words like 'moral' probably often arose in this way. Perhaps 'moral' is not often used with the intention of making only what I have called an

appraisal—although phrases like 'moral condition' and 'morals' probably are—what happens is rather that people begin by using this word in order to make telescoped appraisals plus ascriptions, and come to associate its use with the making of certain familiar appraisals. They then pass to using the word wherever they want to make such appraisals, whether or not in the particular case they would want to make any ascription if they considered the matter separately, or would even claim that one could be made.

I have had to lean to some extent on the use of words like 'blame,' 'praise,' 'responsibility,' 'guilt,' to convey what I wanted to say about the character of ascription. Now these words come as near as any to being used only in the making of ascriptions, but, unfortunately, as was mentioned earlier in the article, there are no words in English which are used exclusively in this way.

We can speak quite correctly of *praising* skilled performances, where the skill is due to endowment, practice, or the possession of special training—where, that is to say, we cannot be making an ascription in praising. 'Responsible' and 'guilty' perhaps come nearest of all to what is required, but both these words have at any rate one use in which they are certainly not being employed to make ascriptions. We often speak of someone being guilty of a wrong action, implying merely that he had in fact done the action—whether through ignorance, under the pressure of an obsession, or whyever. 'Responsible' has also certain uses—among them the one in which it is nearly synonymous with 'in charge'—in which it is at any rate not obviously being used to make ascriptions. For a while I flirted with the idea of using the word 'imputation' instead of 'ascription,' and of distinguishing between ethical judgments which involve making favorable or unfavorable imputations and those which do not. But it was pointed out to me that strictly we impute *motives* (usually bad ones!) rather than praise or blame as such. There is however one use of 'imputing' which comes near to what I want: that in which we say of someone "his behavior was terrible but really no imputation can be made."

II

The deontologists are a notable example of a group of philosophers who were worried about the central ethical problem of ascribing responsibility—"When does it make sense to blame?" For them the problem took a special form determined by their analysis of ethical language. Holding as they did that to know that "x is right" was to be acquainted with an objective non-natural characteristic of an act, the problem took the form, for them, of

whether we can blame someone for not knowing what is objectively right. They seem to have been convinced that certain sorts of ignorance were to be regarded as enough to defeat an ascription. A man might want to act rightly but have deficient knowledge of which actions were right. The distinction between subjective and objective rightness seems to have been intended to show why in these circumstances we do not blame him. Let us look at their concepts and see what they achieve.

"Objective Rightness" is clearly, in our language, an appraisal term: to say that an action is objectively right or wrong is to appraise it and not ascribe any responsibility for its having been done.

Similarly, the notion of "moral obligation" is employed to allow for something which obviously defeats ascription: physical inability to perform an action due to, say, paralysis: "The exertion is all that is his and therefore all that he can be morally obliged to; whether the result follows is due to certain causal laws which he can perhaps know but certainly cannot control, and to a circumstance, viz. his being or not being paralyzed, which he cannot control, and cannot know until he performs the exertion."[3] This is clearly an attempt to arrive at a criterion for the ascription of responsibility. Sir David Ross used what would nowadays be called a 'psychological' language, and wrote as if he were describing possible mental conduct and physical occurrences rather than making a point about the logic of our ethical concepts. Nevertheless, in passages like that quoted he seems to be intending the notions of an 'exertion' and of 'setting one's self to act' to have force like that of our distinction between the proper subject matter of ascription and that of appraisals. Compare also this statement of Prichard's, which was quoted by Sir David Ross: "As regards an obligation, the moral is obvious. It is simply that, contrary to the implication of ordinary language and of moral rules in particular, an obligation must be an obligation, not to do something, but to perform an activity of a totally different kind, that of setting or exerting ourselves to do something, i.e. to bring something about."[4]

Clearly Prichard was right both in pointing out that in ordinary speech we talk of obligations to perform actions, carry out tasks, achieve results in any number of different fields, and in insisting that at the same time a consideration of what we are doing when we speak of 'obligation' leads to the conclusion that it is a

[3] Ross, W. D., *Foundations of Ethics*, p. 160.

[4] Prichard, H. S., *Duty and Ignorance of Fact*, p. 24.

defect of language that it should be possible to speak of someone's being under an obligation to attain some objective.

Let us look for a moment at the notion of 'setting oneself to act' as a way of describing the subject matter of ascriptions. In the form in which it was originally expressed, the conception of 'setting oneself to act' involved the following assumptions: "There is a type of mental activity of which the generic nature is to be the setting oneself to effect a change in a physical object, and of which setting oneself to move a hand or foot is an instance. The change in the physical object, when it follows, is merely the result—the intended result, of course,—of the mental activity."[5] This way of speaking offers us, as an account of the distinction between ascription and appraisal, what is in fact a distinction between talk about 'mental activity' and about 'events' in the physical world. But, even if this distinction were a valid one, it is not the one required. The distinction between being responsible and not being responsible is not the same as the distinction between 'mental events' and 'physical happenings'—responsibility does not strike a frontier at our skin. The distinctions are of different logical type.

If statements about objective rightness are appraisals, it might be thought that statements about subjective rightness would be ascriptions. To say that someone did the subjectively right action, or fulfilled his subjective duty, was simply to say that in fact he did what he thought was right, what he believed to be his duty.

It is thus a purely descriptive statement about a person's beliefs. 'Subjective rightness' turns out to be another notion derived from the use of the inner life-external world dichotomy. Ascriptions of responsibility, however, are not characterized by being accounts of a person's inner life.

We are left with the question, what is the relation between ascription of responsibility and what the deontologists called 'moral goodness'?

I may begin by noting a point of similarity: Sir David Ross insisted upon "the complete non-dependence of moral goodness and (objective) rightness upon one another."[6] This is surely equivalent to the assertion—in my terminology—that to say that a certain action is objectively right is to make a remark of different logical type from an ascription. To say that a person's actions are objectively right is to appraise the nature of certain performances. Of course, the term 'objective rightness' has a much narrower range of applicability than that possessed by the notion of ap-

[5] Ross, W. D., *op. cit.*, p. 153.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

praisal in my usage. This is obvious from the fact that Sir David distinguished between statements about 'rightness' and about 'goodness.' I do not question his right to do so; my point is merely that both these sorts of statements are 'appraisals' in my sense. Both are, in their different ways, about what we have attained or failed to attain. The fact that talk about objective rightness is not co-extensive with appraisal can be seen from the fact that one could make the assertion, 'all his actions are objectively right,' of a person who, because of the effects of various hardships, could still be appraised as lacking in many respects. The term 'right' has a much narrower range of applicability than my notion of appraisal.

Is moral goodness synonymous with subjective rightness? In his first consideration of the relation between these two terms,[1] Ross did not find any close connection between them. What he called 'a morally good act' may be motivated by the desire to bring some good thing into being. Such an act is not necessarily 'right'—even in his most 'subjective' sense of the latter word—since "the act may be done without the agent's thought about his duty, since he has no such thought"—"and conversely, rightness in this sense never guarantees moral goodness. For an act may be an act which the agent thinks his duty, and yet be done from an indifferent or bad motive, and therefore be morally indifferent or bad." It is pretty clear from all this that saying of a person that his actions are or are not 'subjectively right' was not even intended to have the force of an ascription—though at first sight the notion of 'subjective rightness' looked as if it was being groomed for just this sort of logical job.

In his later consideration of the same question, in the chapter on 'moral goodness', he seemed to feel in a position to assert that 'rightness' and 'goodness' do not fall apart quite so much. "For an action will be completely good only if it manifests the whole range of motivation by which an ideally good man would be affected in the circumstances, a sensitiveness to every result for good or for evil that the act is foreseen as likely to have, as well as to any special *prima facie* obligations or disobligations that may be involved; and only if it manifests sensitiveness to all these considerations in their right proportions. But if the agent is responsive to all the morally relevant considerations in their right proportions, he will in fact do the *right* act. Thus no action will have the utmost moral excellence which an action in the circumstances can have, unless it is also the right action."

If 'moral goodness' were to be used as an ascribing term, one

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 166.

would expect its logical affinities to be with 'subjective' rather than 'objective' rightness. And in the passage just quoted some of what is said is consistent with this: he speaks of the results which the act is foreseen as likely to have, and of sensitiveness to *prima facie* obligations. On the other hand, he speaks about the whole range of motivation by which an ideally good man would be affected, about this leading such a person to do what he calls *the* right act, and decides that he can only ascribe what he calls 'the utmost moral excellence' to 'the right act.' All this looks like the appraisal of the sort which is implied by the ordinary use of phrases like 'good character,' or 'moral perfection.' My claim that 'moral goodness' is in fact an appraisal term, and that it is in fact being compared with 'objective rightness' (which is certainly an appraisal term if ever there was one), will I think be adequately supported by the following passage: "Again, an act may have a high degree of moral goodness and yet be entirely different from the right act. A man may be alive to almost all the morally significant features of alternative acts, but may (from prejudice against some individual, for instance, or from lack of imagination) fail to be attracted by just that feature of one of the alternative acts which to a person of ideal moral goodness would be the decisive feature; and in such a case he will do an act completely different from the right act."[8] Lack of imagination, to mention only one point, is a clear instance of something for which responsibility cannot be ascribed. The person of 'ideal moral goodness,' who is to be completely free from prejudices or lack of imagination, would have to be remarkably fortunate in the circumstances of his life. On the other hand, much of the language used throughout the discussion in *The Foundations of Ethics* suggests that talk about 'moral goodness' was intended to have the logical force of ascription. But, as we have seen, the way in which the latter notion is used makes it unsuited to the task. It is very difficult to know how to take many of Sir David's statements, since his use of language did not embody the distinctions which I have been endeavoring to make throughout this article. He spoke of "the moral life," "moral actions," and "moral dispositions." In such phrases, 'moral' must be an appraisal word. He discussed whether or not "only moral virture is good" in a "perfectly objective sense of good," and decides that we are "incapable of equating, in respect of goodness, any amount of pleasure with any amount of morally good action."[9]

[8] The passages cited since the last note are from *The Foundation of Ethics*, pp. 308–310.

[9] *Op. cit.*, p. 275.

I intend to quote one last passage, which I think supports particularly strongly the view that the phrase 'moral goodness' is given the logic appropriate to an appraisal phrase, and that ascriptions are not being distinguished from appraisals. We are told that "certain moral dispositions and actions, and certain activities of the intellect and the creative imagination, appear to be good in a way which depends entirely on their intrinsic nature. . . . These things are good in a sense which is indefinable, but which may be paraphrased by saying that they are fine or admirable activities of the human spirit. . . .Pleasure is never good in this, which I should call the most proper sense of 'good'. . . . The natural moral consciousness finds it very hard to believe that any amount of pleasure can thus outweigh a given good activity and goodness and the recognition of two senses of goodness has vindicated the natural moral consciousness. . . . At the same time, things that are good in a single sense *will* be comparable in respect of goodness. It will be a legitimate question whether in any given situation it is rather our duty to promote some good moral activity, or some good intellectual activity, in ourselves, or others; . . . And if it seems paradoxical to say that a good moral activity is comparable with a good intellectual activity in respect of goodness, it is at least a paradox not peculiar to the view I have put forward; the theory of ideal utilitarianism also contains it, and adds the greater paradox of regarding pleasure also as falling on the same scale of goodness."[10]

Whatever the difficulties of the view which I have set out in this article, I believe it to be free from this kind of paradox. The distinction of logical type between ascriptions and appraisals rules out the possibility of raising the sort of question about the 'goodness' of 'moral activity' and the 'goodness' of other 'good activities' which Ross felt he had got to face. It is, by the way, a question which the so-called "ideal utilitiarians" had to take seriously —indeed, as Ross pointed out, they were in a worse position in this regard than he was. Some of the distinctions which characterized writers of the deontologist school looked as if they might be sufficient to provide an escape from these paradoxes about the use of "goodness," and I have therefore given most space to considering their arguments; what I have said about the deontologist use of phrases like 'moral goodness' applies, if anything, more strongly to the use of such phrases by the "ideal utilitarians."

To sum up my position in regard to the sort of deontologist assertion quoted and considered in this article: Was Sir David Ross writing purely about what I call appraisal, or was he rather

[10] *Op. cit.*, pp. 282–284.

not offering us statements that were in fact appraisals as if these statements had the kind of logic which I attribute to an ascription of responsibility?

Ross's "ideally good man" was a person of a high degree of attainment, he was free from any deficiency which would prevent his possessing an extremely sensitive awareness, a responsiveness towards the whole range of motivation, which would be appropriate to him in any given circumstances. He must be granted an understanding of all *prima facie* obligations that may be involved. Ross attributed what he called "the utmost moral excellence" to such a person. Is this statement to be taken as equivalent to the assertion in my language of the most favorable sort of appraisal? Or, does he imply that he has ascribed complete freedom from blame to a person? If the former, my only objection would be that the description hardly gives a picture of a being who lacks no attainment. The person described is only given, for instance, a perfect sensitiveness to every result for good or evil that his actions are "foreseen as likely to have," to be completely perfect, he would require to have perfect knowledge of the effects which his actions were in fact going to have. However, in this—and I think in every other respect—the being described by Sir David is just a man such as we observe evry day whose experience, like ours, certainly is limited in all sorts of ways.

If, on the other hand, Ross meant, by speaking of "moral excellence," something other than the most favorable sort of appraisal, my comment is that it is not clear that his phrase can be about anything but the absence, in the case of certain particularly fortunate people, of certain lacks from which most of us suffer.

The analytical apparatus of the deontologists could not and did not contain *any* way of making the distinction between ascribing and appraising, simply because it was constructed wholly in terms of an inapproporiate model taken from traditional ways of viewing the mind-mody problem, when what was needed was the quite different set of distinctions between the use of different sorts of ethical language.

Ascriptions of responsibility cannot be understood if they are construed as *descriptions* of the presence of a mental state or event like "voluntariness," "attention" or "setting oneself" to act.[11]

V. C. WALSH

NEW YORK, N. Y.

[11] See H. L. A. Hart, *loc. cit.*

ARPER

By LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

The Blue and Brown Books

"No German-speaking philosopher since Kant and Hegel has influenced Anglo-American philosophy half as much as Wittgenstein. And what exerted the greatest influence was . . . his talks to his classes in Cambridge in the 1930's. The 'Blue Book' and the 'Brown Book,' which he dictated in English to students between 1933 and 1935, represent the teaching which accomplished what is sometimes called a 'revolution in philosophy.' "—WALTER KAUFMANN, Princeton University. "Every serious student of philosophy will want to own this volume."—MAX BLACK, Cornell University

At your bookseller $6.00

HARPER & BROTHERS, New York 16, N. Y.

THE HARVARD EDUCATIONAL REVIEW

announces

A SYMPOSIUM:

WHAT CAN PHILOSOPHY CONTRIBUTE TO EDUCATIONAL THEORY?

THE CONTRIBUTORS ARE:

C. J. Ducasse
William K. Frankena
Kingsley Price
George Barton
Harry S. Broudy
Israel Scheffler

Single copies: $1.00 **Fall, 1958**

Write to:

HARVARD EDUCATIONAL REVIEW

Lawrence Hall, Kirkland Street, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts

Student-centered Texts in Philosophy

Living Issues in Philosophy

An Introductory Textbook **· SECOND EDITION**

1953

Harold H. Titus, Denison University

The student who uses this text is helped to see the basic issues of his time and to build a basic philosophy of his own. Avoiding undue emphasis on any one school of philosophy, the author sets forth a well-balanced treatment of all theories.

Ethics for Today

THIRD EDITION **1957**

Harold H. Titus, Denison University

In this text the author encourages the student to think constructively about the ethical problems of daily life. With great skill he clarifies ethical concepts by examples within the experience of today's young people. The scope of the book is broad, and the treatment of business and professional ethics is unusually full.

Great Traditions in Ethics

An Introduction **1953**

Ethel M. Albert, formerly of Syracuse University

Theodore C. Denise and Sheldon P. Peterfreund
Syracuse University

This text presents primary source materials in such a way that the beginning student can readily understand their content and significance. The constituent ideas of the various theories are set off from one another, and connecting passages serve both as transitions and as explanations of important concepts.

COLLEGE DIVISION

American Book Company

55 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 3, NEW YORK